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Fifth film 'Phantom' full of faults

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Arts & Entertainment Editor

A new production company hooks up with a great old story, hires Robert Englund to play the lead, but then chickens out.

Too bad, really. This fifth film version (bearing no resemblance to the current blockbuster stage musical by the same name) by new Cannon Films-offshoot 21st Century Film Corporation, pretends to go back to the story's roots — the 1911 novel by Gaston Leroux. That means the horrid Phantom is a Faustian no-good, rather than the pitied, luckless genius in later versions (most notably Claude Rains almost 50 years ago).

Englund, known and loved by "Nightmare on Elm Street" fans as Freddy Krueger, plays Eric, the composer who sells himself to the devil in return for a promise that his music will live forever.

Singer/actress Jill Schoelen is Christine, the understudy soprano whom Eric loves from afar — the depths of his rat-infested, organ-hall lair in the London sewers, beneath the opera house.

Christine, too, has a driving wish for stardom. She's almost willing to sell herself to Eric (the Phantom) to keep the spotlight Eric manipulates for her, via bloody mayhem that spews gore while he knifes, decapitates and skins almost a dozen hapless victims.

This version begins at an opera audition in present-day New York. Christine is time-warped back to 1885 via a bump on the head. There she relives the horror inflicted by the "part-time composer, part-time serial killer." We always figure Christine will get back to the Big Apple. We just wonder under what circumstances, and in what condition.

The movie was shot mainly in Hungary with a solid British company. It is well-costumed and richly set. Englund won't disappoint his Krueger fans, but won't gain any other converts. Schoelen is weak — in looks, in voice and in stage presence.

The super soundtrack and operatic opportunities fizzle when they're muted, as if director Dwight Little is afraid too much great music will dull the senses of the primary audience Englund will bring to the box office.

He underestimates them.

Film review

"The Phantom of the Opera"
A fifth remake of the classic tale, this time with considerable bloodshed, terror and inhumanity, for which it is rated R.
★★½ stars out of possible 5.

Actor Robert Englund ... 'Elm Street's' Freddy Krueger tries his hand at "Phantom"

Fifth Film Phantom Full of Faults

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